

Better Nutrition and More Physical Activity Can Boost Achievement and Schools' Bottom Line

The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools documents how the excessive rise in poor nutrition, inactivity and weight problems adversely affect academic achievement and possibly cost schools millions of dollars each year. The report calls on schools to work with partners to address the issue, and points to current best practices in schools.

It is critical that as schools search for solutions to meet performance outcomes and minimize budget cuts, schools do not further aggravate problems of poor nutrition and inactive lifestyles - in turn it may undermine schools overall goal to provide high-quality education for all students.

The Learning Connection reveals costs to schools due to problems associated with poor nutrition and physical activity – the root causes of obesity.

Costs in Achievement

- Schools with high percentages of students who did not routinely engage in physical activity or eat well had smaller gains in test scores than other schools.
- Well-nourished students who skip breakfast perform worse on tests and have poor concentration.
- Children not getting adequate nutrients have lower test scores; even transient hunger from missing a meal affects performance.
- Physical activity programs are linked to stronger academic achievement.
- Students participating in daily physical education exhibit better attendance and achievement.

Costs in Dollars

- In states that use attendance to help determine state funding, a single-day absence by just one student can cost a school district anywhere from \$9 to \$20.
- If children miss just one day per month, this could cost a large school district like New York about **\$28 million each year**, while Chicago would forfeit about **\$9 million each year** in state funds.
- This type of absentee rate is highly probable, and could cost an average size school district from \$95,000 to \$160,000 annually in important state aid.

The Hidden Costs

- Extra staff time needed for students with low academic performance or behavior problems caused by poor nutrition and physical inactivity.
- Costs associated with time and staff needed to administer medications needed by students with associated health problems.
- Healthcare costs, absenteeism, and lower productivity due to the affects of poor nutrition, inactivity and overweight among school employees.

What can schools do?

- Form a school health advisory council and involve students, parents, teachers, health professionals and other community leaders.
- Develop a comprehensive wellness policy that includes recommendations for increasing physical activity and improving the nutrition environment.
- Offer more after-school programs that provide nutritious snacks, physical activity and nutrition education.
- Encourage staff to model healthy lifestyles.
- Integrate physical activity and nutrition education into the regular school day.



The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools is available at www.ActionForHealthyKids.org

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